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ABSTRACT

Approximately 35 literacy practitioners in Pennsylvania were trained and mentored in action research from July 1995-June 1996. The project used two models of delivery. With a team of five trainers/mentors, the urban model was developed in the Pittsburgh and Erie western region and an outreach model was used in the northern, northeastern, and central regions of the state. In the urban sites, two trainers/mentors met biweekly/monthly with participants at two major institutional host locations in Pittsburgh and Erie. In the outreach model, the three outreach trainers/mentors conducted one or two training sessions with remote learner groups and followed up by telephone/teleconference. Products included an action research handbook and planner and four newsletters. The project established a data bank and network among participants. An informal meeting of participants was conducted at the annual state literacy conference, at which it was found that 29 literacy practitioners came to the project organizational meetings; 25 were trained/mentored; 20 monographs were completed; and the group support of the urban model made it more effective than the outreach model. (Appendixes include the handbook, four Action Update newsletters, and evaluation results.) (YLB)

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ED 402 487

FINAL REPORT

"Action Research for Staff Development in Four Regional Staff Development Centers and Establishment of a Statewide Action Research Network."

Project Number 099-6013
1995-1996

Project Director
Dr. B. Allan Quigley
Associate Professor, Adult Education
The Pennsylvania State University

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TITLE PAGE

Title:	**Action Research for Staff Development in Four Regional Staff Development Centers and Establishment of a Statewide Action Research Training Network**
Project Director:	Dr. Allan Quigley, Associate Professor Regional Director, Director Adult Education, Penn State University.
Fiscal Year:	1995-1996
Agency Address:	PA-ARN (Pennsylvania Action Research Network) Penn State University, Center for Continuing and Graduate Education, 4518 Northern Pike, MONROEVILLE, PA. 15146
Project No:	099-6013 Funding: $45,740

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ABSTRACT PAGE

Title: Action Research for Staff Development in Four Regional Staff Development Centers and Establishment of a Statewide Action Research Training Network

Project No: 099-6013 **Funding:** $45,740

Project Director: Dr. Allan Quigley, Associate Professor and Regional Director, Director Adult Education, Penn State University.

Agency Address: PA-ARN (Pennsylvania Action Research Network) Penn State University, Center for Continuing and Graduate Education, 4518 Northern Pike, MONROEVILLE, PA. 15146

Contact: Dr. Allan Quigley

Purpose: The project: trained and mentored approximately 35 literacy practitioners in action research from July 1995-June 1996 and used two training models. Wrote and disseminated an Action Research Handbook and Planner and four Action Update newsletters. Established a data bank and network among participants. Conducted an informal meeting of participants at the annual state literacy conference.

Procedures: With a team of five trainers/mentors, develop an "urban model" in the Pittsburgh and Erie, western region; and an outreach model in the northern, north-eastern, and central regions of the state. In the urban sites, two trainers/mentors met bi-weekly - monthly with participants at two major institutional host locations in Pittsburgh and Erie. In the outreach model, the three outreach trainers/mentors conducted one to two training sessions with remote learner groups and followed up by telephone/teleconference.

Summary of Findings: Twenty-nine literacy practitioners came to organizational meetings. Twenty-five were trained/mentored. Twenty monographs were completed. The group support of the urban model made it more effective than the outreach model.

Comments: PA-ARN co-operated with the similar Philadelphia-based project (PALPIN) and included progress on the PALPIN project in the PA-ARN newsletter. The two projects invited a state-wide Virginia project to co-host an action research pre-conference at the national COABE conference held in Pittsburgh in May 1996. The two directors of PA-ARN and PALPIN, and Director of the PA. Dept. of Education Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education presented a panel at COABE on their state-wide initiatives.

Products: 20 Monographs of completed projects, 4 newsletters (x 3800 recipients =15,200 copies distributed), complete data bank.

Descriptors:

INTRODUCTION

The two basic purposes of this project were to: (1) Supplement the traditional professional staff development model being used in Pennsylvania by adding a practitioner-based model of action research, and (2) to add practice-based knowledge to the literature as created by practitioners themselves.

In an attempt to reach the western, northern and most of the central part of the state (a second 353 project out of Philadelphia, PALPIN, would reach the South East and South Central parts of the state), two models of delivery were compared: (1) an urban model whereby practitioners met regularly at an urban location for both the training and follow up on projects, (2) a rural outreach model where a small group of geographically remote practitioners would meet only one to two times for the training and, with an action research handbook, conduct their project using telephone and conference call mentoring from an outreach trainer/mentor. Each practitioner action research project would conform to quality control standards set by the Handbook and each successful project would be made available in a monograph for wide distribution across the state. Four issues of a newsletter insert would be sent to the nine Regional Staff Development Center to be included in their monthly mail-out newsletters. A data bank on all participants and projects would be developed and networking among the participants would be encouraged. A final meeting of all involved would be hosted at the annual Pennsylvania Adult Education conference (in 1996 this was part of the national COABE Conference in Pittsburgh).

The project was aimed at anyone involved in literacy--teachers, tutors, administrators, counsellors and policy-makers. The results of the projects as published in the monograph series will be of interest to researchers as well as practitioners. Permanent copies are available at the AdvancE library in Harrisburg and also at the Western Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Resource Center in Harrisburg (addresses below):

AdvancE West
WPALRC 5347 William Flym
Rt. 8
Gibsonia, PA 15044-9644

AdvancE, PDE Resource Center
Dept. of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

REPORT

A. Statement of the Problem:

After decades of funded 353 and related research, countless articles and books in adult education, conferences and institutes, faced with increasing accountability and higher quality standards, it is apparent today that neither experts nor practitioners know how best to recruit adult learners, how best to retain adults, how best to evaluate programs, or even how best to teach undereducated adults. The public school system has well recognized this problem. There is awareness in k-12, (and growing awareness in Adult Education) that "expert research" or "received research" is not the entire answer to everyday practitioner problems. The schooling literature is becoming replete with success stories at the classroom and local school level due to a growing use of practitioner-based action research. In a 1989 issue of the Journal of Reading, it is noted: "Teachers traditionally think of research as belonging to universities and statisticians. However, classroom researchers are learning that informal types of action research carried on in their classrooms can provide a proactive way to improve teaching and learning."

Meanwhile. adult literacy programs across CA, NY, MA and, most recently, VA have begun using action research with practitioner involvement. As realized in public education and becoming important in adult literacy, what is missing at the every day operational level is: (1) A valid method for practitioners to take other's research findings and be able to

test, then adapt them in their own classrooms; (2) a way for practitioners to systematically study their own research ideas on a daily-action basis; and (3) although literacy practitioners "learn by doing" very well, it has been found they rarely share their learning widely (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982). So, despite efforts to bring practitioners together, their problems and their findings typically stay in their separate classrooms and programs. In short, the field does not lack "received research"--including 353 research. Practitioners lack ways to systematically apply expert findings; ways to observe and validate the outcomes of their own work; and, too often, the confidence to share their knowledge widely (Lytle & Cochran-Smith 1990). As a result, the field does not develop or apply expert knowledge well, nor does it inform itself very well from its own practice.

Thus, we have never been able to create a research agenda to work on common issues. We constantly "re-invent" the best ways to recruit, retain, teach in isolated activities without sharing. We have accumulated "research-knowledge" without "practice-wisdom."

B. The Goals and Objectives of the Project:

B.1 Goals:

This proposal sought to <u>add</u> the staff development dimension of "doing by learning," as action research founder Kurt Lewin said, to the field's research base. At the time of submission, Project Director, Allan Quigley had taught action research

classes (e.g., 12 1/2 hour courses for one Penn State credit) through the invitation and coordination of the state's Regional Staff Development Centers (RSDC) in the following locations: Erie (x2), Pittsburgh, Altoona, Scranton, Harrisburg, Cabrini College. Typically, the average number attending was 10 practitioners. As a result, there was a critical mass of approximately 50 who were aware of and interested in action research. Also, at an open organizational meeting of anyone interested in an Action Research Network held by A. Quigley at the 1995 Midwinter PAACE Conference, 16 signed up with addresses saying they want to join an Action Research Network, as described here. With this beginning group of 50-75 across the state, this project sought to build a network of teachers/administrators/researchers able to help others, willing to work together on common problems, and agreed to develop and work on a state-wide research agenda--all based out of everyday program and classroom needs.

B.2 Objectives:

Engage approximately 35 practitioners state-wide as per identified RSDC's in action research as the primary means of staff development.

In RSDC #1 and RSDC #4 as region-wide experimental demonstration projects, involve a team of three trainer/mentors in the Pittsburgh/Erie region and a written Action Research Handbook and Planner to:

1) In Erie and Pittsburgh Regions:

• Have two major agencies in Pittsburgh (RSDC #1) and one in

Erie (RSDC #4) as host sites for training and meetings.

• Have one action research trainer/mentor meet interested practitioners regularly at each of the two urban host sites.

• "Outreach" to those practitioners in #1 and #4 who cannot travel to Erie or Pittsburgh using small groups, fewer meetings and telephone follow up.

• Have one action research trainer/mentor outreach to those who cannot travel to the two host sites.

2) In regions outside of the Pittsburgh/Erie Western regions:

• Engage practitioners through a second "outreach" model in RSDCs #2, #3, #5, #7 (as requested).

• These would not involve regular meetings at an urban center. The more remote practitioners not near Erie or Pittsburgh in these four regions who had approval from their director and (and RSCD Coordinator) would be trained by a second team of two action researcher trainers/mentors.

• The second team of "Outreach trainers" would reach these remote practitioners in smaller groups (of two to five) with one or two face-to-face training workshops, the training handbook, and follow up with telephone conference calls. Where budget permits, face-to-face follow assistance would also occur.

• The complete team consisted of five: Two "urban trainers/mentors working in Erie & Pittsburgh and a total of

three "Outreach trainers/mentors in regions #1 & #4; # 2, #3, #5, #7.

3) Write and distribute to interested practitioners in the project and through AdvancE a Practitioner's Action Research Handbook and Planning Guide which can be used state-wide by practitioners to conduct action-research projects. This would be based on proven state and national action research models.

4) Develop an edited monograph series of project outcomes to be distributed through AdvancE.

5) Establish a newsletter (insert) for members of the network and the entire state.

6) Establish a data bank on all of the projects whether completed or not as a record of what has taken place and how. This would contain names, addresses, phone numbers, questions posed, interventions used, results.

7) Establish a network of PA Action Researchers using the newsletter, network of phone numbers, and a meeting at the annual PAACE Conference in Hershey PA.

C. Procedures Employed:

The project was conducted from July 1, 1995-June 30, 1996 in six different locations within RSDC regions 1 & 4 with outreach to regions 2, 3, 7 & 5. These included: Pittsburgh, Erie, Beaver, Johnstown, Pleasant Gap, Radnor and meetings in Altoona as well as Monaca.

To conduct these two-level urban/rural project, two trainers/mentors: Drucie Weirauch and Dr. Gary Kuhne conducted bi-weekly/monthly meetings, respectively, at Goodwill Industries in Pittsburgh and the Tri-County Intermediate Unit in Erie (or Meadville). The three others formed the outreach team: Linda Ritchie, David Fetterman, Kathy Kalinosky. Linda worked in Johnstown, Kathy out of Scranton and David out of Murrysville.

By February 1996, 13 practitioners had been engaged in the Erie project (from approx. six counties, five agencies); 12 in the Pittsburgh project (from seven institutions/agencies). Another major Pittsburgh institution observed later in February and decided to add practitioners if this project is funded for next year. By February, four practitioners have been trained and were working on projects in Johnstown (region 5); two were being trained in Beaver (Region 4), three in the Radnor area (Region 7). Presentations on the model had been made in Regions 3, 5, 2 and 7 by mid-March.

ABLE teachers, tutors, program administrators and counselors became involved from large urban, smaller urban and rural programs. The majority of the projects were on learner retention.

D. Objectives Met:

• A Pennsylvania Action Research Handbook & Project Planner was written by A. Quigley and reviewed by the expert panel of two expert practitioners and one Penn State expert faculty member (Appendix A). This was used in all of the training sessions for

the participants and disseminated to the participants. The planner formed the basis for each project and only when this was acceptably complete could an individual's project begin.

• Two trainer/mentor teams were established and they met with interested practitioners in rural and urban settings as described earlier. The evaluation of the training and the projects overall are seen in Appendix C.

• Four newsletters were written and issued using the existing newsletters from the RSDCs (Appendix B). Since approximately 3,800 were issued each time, some 14,200 copies were made available across the state.

• Twenty monographs were completed (Appendix D)* and many participants said on their evaluations that they would continue with further cycles of the project and new projects using action research. Authors have signed release forms so that their names and addresses or phone numbers are available to those interested in further information. The titles of those complete at the time of this document are as follows and are permanently located at the AdvancE and Western Pennsylvania Resource Center mentioned above:

ERIE & Region #1

• Recruitment of ABE Students Through Structured Strategies - Gary Narbut and Joe Mando

• Implementing a Portfolio System in the Adult Reading/Writing Classroom - Karen Tuminello

*See Final Products.

• Utilizing Alternative Assessment Tools - Joy Zamierowski

• Linking Adult Education Programs to Post-Secondary Institutions Barbara Kroh

• Increasing the Willingness of Volunteer Tutors to Tutor Math - Katherine Frantz

• Using Adult Education Interventions with Stroke-Impaired Adults - Marcia Anderson

• Learner-Retention Action Plan - Liza Schmalzried

• The Retention of Students Through a Counselor Support System - Bonita Miller

• Increasing Student Retention Through Small-Group Tutoring - Maloy Beach

PITTSBURGH & Region #4

• Building Self-Esteem Through Reading - Dr. Susan Cooper

• Improving Attendance in an Adult Literacy Program - Pat Scott

• Improving Retention and Resolving Personal Problems by Instituting a Student Support Group - Nicole Despines

• Increasing Recruitment in the Gateway Project - Paige Thomas and Gail Cambell

• Increasing the Return of Monthly Progress Reports - Debbie Thompson

• Helping ABE Students Set Realistic Goals Through Instructor/Student Interviews - Judith Aaronson and Margaret Hopkins

• Reducing Waiting Lists with Small Group Instruction - Hedy Miller

RADNOR and Region #7

• How Classroom Tests Affect a Student's Sense of Progress - Kathleen Moon

• Increasing Students' Critical Reading Skills - Monica McAghon

JOHNSTOWN and Region #5

• Increasing Vocabulary Levels of Deaf Students - Patricia Palmiscino

• Improving the Attendance of Adult Learners in a Vocational Rehabilitation Facility - Virginia Fetsko, Nancy Ott, Lisa Walsh

E: Objectives Not Met:

• It was hoped that 35 participants would be involved in this project. Twenty-nine were involved in fact with 25 completing a monograph by project end. It is thought that more would have been involved but for three unforeseen problems:

1) A proposal out of Philadelphia (PALPIN) was funded by PDE therefore a large section of the state was served by that project, reducing the population base for PA-ARN. PALPIN held a winter institute in Philadelphia which recruited across the entire state and into the regions being served by PA-ARN, again reducing the population base and amount of funding for practitioners at the local level.

2) The project began late due to an issue raised by PDE concerning funding for the newsletter's distribution. This newsletter was our central recruitment tool and the project could not begin until two months later than

anticipated due to this question raised.

3) Practitioners were given $300 for participation by this project in regions #1 and #4. Outside of #1 and #4, the other regions had to provide an honorarium. Although some of the practitioners we talked to said they did not care about the honorarium, if their RSDC either did not have the funds for this or were skeptical about the project itself, the practitioners were effectively "cut off" from direct service. The task became one of convincing a few of the RSDC directors of the value of the project so we might serve their practitioners. This was a layer of approval which was not anticipated in the original proposal.

F: Objectives Exceeded:

• The newsletter from PA-ARN was offered to PALPIN to carry updates of their progress so that a unified progress statement could be given to the entire state.

• A pre-conference on Action Research was organized primarily by A. Quigley to bring the PALPIN and Virginia projects together at the COABE Conference in Pittsburgh in May 1996.

G. Evaluation and Results of the Project:

A mail-out evaluation of the project was sent to all participants with a return of 17 out of 29 (59%). The results (see Appendix C) indicate that the participants were very pleased with the project and had no major criticisms.

H. Conclusions:

Action research is a well established method of practitioner-based research for problem solving, knowledge production, and for professional staff development. This project indicated that action research provides a way to approach relevant issues in literacy classrooms and programs with immediacy and ownership by those who live the actual problems. Unlike traditional research methods, the knowledge gained is of direct use for those involved. Unlike traditional professional development models which bring expert knowledge to the region, this assures relevance and can reach even the most remote practitioner. The need for group support was apparent. The outreach model provided training and mentoring to those who could not get to the urban centers. However, to use this again, more meetings are needed than one to two, and it is recommended that participants be paired and agree to contact each other regularly (e.g., weekly) for greater peer support.

I. Recommendations:

- Begin the project when planned.
- Give more explanatory information about the project in the recruitment materials.
- Give information to the RSDC Coordinators so they agree to its use in principal and do not hold the project back therefore.
- Provide honoraria out of the grant itself in all cases.
- Refine the outreach model so that a peer support system is tried and build in more meetings with the remote learner groups.

Do not, however, effectively abandon the remote learners. Based on this year's work, face-to-face meetings are essential. Technology is not a substitute for face-to-face interaction since a rapport is needed. Support is necessary for ongoing success even in the remote areas.

• A committee headed by PDE should look over the PA-ARN and PALPIN results and meet with both PA-ARN and PALPIN to set a state research agenda. This means, agree on the most pressing topics identified by those participants in both projects this year, develop a strategy for harmonizing and widely disseminating the information thus far from both and be sure that the "wheel is not being re-invented" in each of these same areas through future 353's, etc. Also, such a committee should consider how these findings can be replicated in the field to enhance validity of findings and consider if the state should encourage certain regions or participants to take on specific topics from the research agenda into the future.

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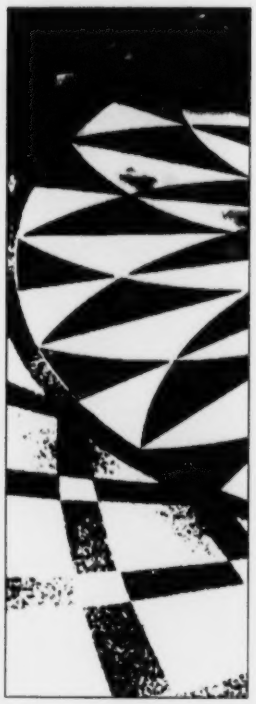
APPENDIX A



Pennsylvania Action Research Handbook & Project Planner

FOR ADULT LITERACY AND BASIC EDUCATION TEACHERS, TUTORS, PROGRAM PLANNERS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND POLICY-MAKERS

by B. Allan Quigley, Ed.D.
The Pennsylvania State University

A Section 353 Project of the
Pennsylvania Department of Education,
Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education

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Action Research Planner P-1

I. CHANGING THE IMAGE OF RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

The Problem with the Term *Research*

The problem with the term *action research* is that the idea of *action* seems perfectly acceptable but *research* too often provokes negative reactions. In action research courses I've taught to literacy and ESL teachers, tutors and administrators, from volunteer-based to institutional to corrections to GED programs, over the past three years, I always begin by asking the participants what they think *research* means to most of their colleagues. I typically hear: "Research means boring statistics," "irrelevant studies we can't use," "something I am not qualified to do and most don't want to learn how to do," or "information published in university journals which nobody reads anyway." Thankfully these are not the *only* answers I get. I also get (a few) responses like: "For myself, I think research is a way to open new exciting possibilities," or "It is discovering the way things really are."

Almost all teachers, administrators, and policy-makers search for better ways to do their jobs. We try to improve our practice, giving a great deal of credence to something called *research.* Every professional conference, every governmental agency, and all educational institutions make reference to research of some type on a regular basis. Yet, despite continued reference to it, decisions in classrooms and educational administration are made for all sorts of reasons—and research is typically not among them (Finch, 1984; Mintzberg, 1975). Somehow, even if research is available at decision time, it is too often either not relevant enough for the issues posed or not compelling enough to sway decision-makers (Majchrzak, 1984). "My situation is different," is the familiar response.

Meanwhile, the term *research* is used constantly in the media. From talk shows to coffee conversation, when someone begins a statement with: "The research shows ... " there is normally little challenge to either the findings, the process, or even the point made. Who conducted "the research," how, when, using what method ... these are questions rarely asked. As a public, we seem to hold an almost mystified awe for this thing called research. People seek to lend credibility to the points they make by, for instance, going to the library, then saying they have "done some research" on a topic. When someone says they have "research" to quote, others listen. Yet, when someone suggests we might actually conduct research ourselves, somehow all the negatives come forward and remarkably few carry forward with it. *Research* is surely one of the most fascinating, most enigmatic, and most powerful terms of the late 20th century.

What does the term mean? Merriam and Simpson have said, "The defining characteristic of research is that it is a systematic, structured, purposeful, disciplined process of discovering reality" (1984, p.4). Garrison (1994) states: "The process of research is to formulate, analyze, and test theories in an open, critical, and systematic manner. In a personal favorite from the novel *Dust Tracks on a Road,* is: "Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell within" (p.39, Hurston, 1984). The aim of research is to create order through the development of coherent frameworks. In the wider field of adult education, which focuses on people and their problems, research is often taken to be "a matter of process, not of outcomes" (Merriam & Simpson, 1984, p.4). If, in adult education, it were better understood that not all research methods are the same, that process matters, and that not all methods are as the stereotypes suggest, then maybe more practitioners would engage in research activity. And, maybe more would be critical of those daily assertions we hear which are supposedly "research-based."

Action Research and the Range of Research Possibilities

While it is not the purpose here to discuss the range of research methods at length or to restate the arguments about the strengths and weaknesses of each method, it *is* important to *locate* action research—the method to be discussed in this Handbook—within the range of other methods. Action research falls in among the qualitative, or naturalistic, group of methods (see Appendix A) (Patton, 1980; Guba & Lincoln, 1988). It is considered descriptive, nonexperimental research. It does not depend on statistics for its analysis. In action research, the emphasis is placed on participants being the beneficiaries of the findings. The participants are normally fully aware of the project of which they are part. It assumes the world cannot be "frozen" or made static while one conducts an experiment. In fact, it begins with the assumption that research can be done in the midst of action and change and assumes that we can go through several cycles of investigation on the same issue. Finally, it assumes that practitioners are the experts. In these respects, action research is one of the best tools for job improvement.

Its label often gets confusing, however (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Hubbard & Power, 1993, 1993; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1990; Peters & Robinson, 1984). Generally, action research is what John Dewey's described as "reflective inquiry." It is sometimes referred to as "practitioner inquiry" or "practitioner research" (e.g., Cockley, 1993), "collaborative research" (Pates, 1992), or "participatory research" (Fernandes & Tandon, 1981; Hall, Gillette & Tandon, 1982). It indeed a participatory approach to

systematic inquiry (Tom & Sork, 1994) and it definitely places great emphasis on the practitioner, the process, participation, and personal reflection. But, regardless of label or nuance, like most research methods, it seeks to find order in what so often seems to be chaos. And, as has been proven repeatedly in education, it is extremely well suited to everyday educational work settings for individuals and inquiry teams alike (Mekosh-Rosenbaum, n.d.; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1984).

However it is defined or labeled, action research isn't "boring." The founder of action research, Kurt Lewin, considered this approach exciting, even vital, to understanding what we are doing (Weisbord, 1987). Lewin said action research is "doing by learning." In other words, he believed we can learn our way through problems on the job and in much of our daily lives in ways which can help explain and affect the reality around us. As Lewin argued, individual findings can have wide implications for others facing the same or very similar questions. This latter point is well documented in the K-12 school education literature (e.g., Allen, Combs, Hendricks, Nash, & Wilson, 1988). The schools have taken the lead in action research in classrooms and schools in the U.S., Britain, Canada, and Australia but, increasingly, adult literacy and mainstream adult education in North America is starting to use action research as well. Examples of the growing interest in the variations of action research are seen, for instance, in *The Community Exchange* (staff, 1994) newsletter from California's Consortium for Workforce Education and Lifelong Learning; in the materials from North Carolina's Literacy South (e.g., Pates, 1992); the long-standing research promoted from the Highlander Research and Education Center (e.g., Gaventa & Horton, 1981), as well as that from The Center on Adult Literacy at the University of Tennessee; statewide action research in Virginia (see Cockley, 1993); and literacy action research work out of New York's Columbia University Teachers College, Center for Adult Education (e.g., Staff, 1994). With growing interest in action research in countries such as Australia (e.g., McTaggart & Singh, 1986); Britain (e.g., Whitehead, 1989); Canada (e.g., Hall, Gillette & Tandon, 1982), and a range of developing countries (e.g., Swantz, 1978; Hudson, 1980), the mounting interest in action research in the United States (Whyte, 1989) shows promise for change in our field.

II. ACTION RESEARCH: AN OVERVIEW

What Is Action Research?

In its application, action research is essentially trial and error made systematic through analysis, observation, and data collection. Unlike trial and error, action research has the very important distinction that it holds the potential to achieve high validity and reliability (or "repeatability") and its findings can be applied in similar settings across the country. But action research is very like trial and error in that the researcher tries a "hunch"—or intervention—then, after observing and reflecting, typically tries yet another variation of the "hunch" (Argyris, 1989).

The wide consensus is that action research is research carried out by practitioners with a view to improving their professional practice and understanding it better. The key here is *improving* practitioners' practice and *the attempt to understand* what we do more thoroughly.

One of the most straightforward definitions of action research is provided by Isaac: "To develop new skills or new approaches and to solve problems with direct application to the classroom or working world setting" (1971, p.27). The key in this definition is our *own* work setting.

Kemmis and McTaggart (1984) in Australia, have given a good summary of action research as an open, ongoing process based on putting new ideas to the test:

> [Action research involves] Trying new ideas in practice as a means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge about the curriculum, teaching, and learning. The result is improvement in what happens in the classroom and school, and a better articulation and justification of the educational rationale for what goes on. Action research provides a way of working which links theory and practice into the one whole: ideas-in-action. (p.5)

The key phrase here is *"articulation and justification of the educational rationale for what goes on"* since the results of action research can build the base for an argument for change—including a case for increased funds or program structural changes, as seen in Section V.

How Is Action Research Used?

Action research has four distinct steps: **1) plan, 2) act, 3) observe, 4) reflect.** It then permits the practitioner to try yet another cycle of the four

steps of a revised plan, act, observe, and reflect, and so on into yet other cycles, as needed. Action research does not exactly "end." It gives us a means to test new insights as they appear and to observe systematically how each of these new insights affects our practice.

Perhaps the most difficult part is when a teacher, program planner, administrator, or policy-maker tries to identify a manageable (i.e., "researchable") problem. The first step, therefore, is often the most challenging. Typically, problems are like the layers of an onion—remove one layer and there is another right below it. It is at this beginning stage when one may need to talk with others familiar with the issue being raised. Brainstorming on better ways to approach a problem, and added fact-finding to help understand the problem, may have to come first. What is a "best hunch" when, perhaps, a dozen alternatives present themselves? Where should we begin to intervene with a perceived problem? And when? And who might need to be consulted or involved? Is it possible that there has been prior research on this very question?

In fact, action research may *not* the best approach for the problem you perceive. For instance, action research is probably the way to study a new math technique and to compare it with the old technique to see if it works better. It is probably the way to study a new counseling-teacher strategy to improve retention across a set of courses. It can help greatly in knowing if a new recruitment approach is better than the old one. But, it will likely not help in trying to study or resolve very emotionally-charged or complex politically-driven issues. Personal difficulties on the job with an insensitive supervisor is not a good choice, for instance. Action research may not be adequate to trying to deal with a faltering program located in a neighborhood hostile to the adult education's presence there. Some problems are so psychologically, emotionally, or politically charged that they require more than an action research study to either fully understand or change them.

So, how does one decide what sort of problem is appropriate? As a general rule, *take on only what you can personally manage and personally carry through on.* And, as a cardinal rule, *begin with a small aspect of a identified problem*. Then, as you go, decide what the next "intervention cycle" step should be in understanding and resolving the problem. Overall, *build answers through small, well understood, steps.*

So, having identified a problem and an intervention—or having decided upon a "best hunch," the questions will then become: How can this new intervention (e.g., idea, strategy, approach) be implemented? How can this Working Proposition be observed while it is being used? How long should I test this intervention? And, how will I know it works "better" than what I did before?

III. USING ACTION RESEARCH: THE SIX BASIC STEPS

Action research is based on inductive experimentation. It follows a "process of cycles." We move through a set of decisions and sequential steps in the first cycle; then, having learned something from this first cycle, we typically try a revised intervention through a second cycle. And so on into further cycles (see Fig. 1). Unlike several other research methods, action research, by its very nature, typically demands revision, refinement, and redefinition of the problem itself because it is conducted in the changing world of practice.

Cycle One: The Planning Stage

1. The Problem Step

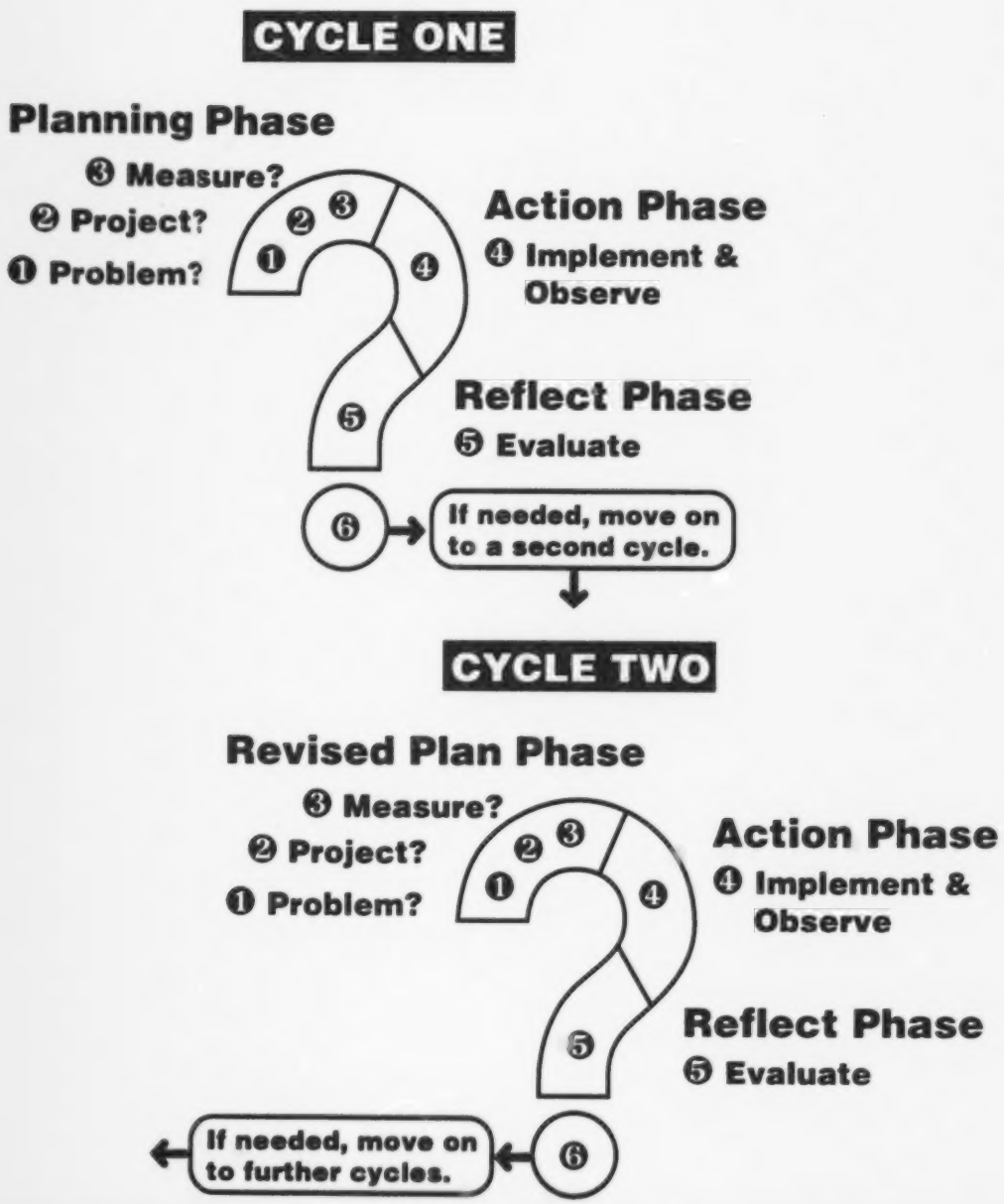
The motivation to try a project usually resides in what I call "an itch." It comes from something we do, something we experience, something we become aware of which we just cannot seem to make "work"—but we know it *should* work. It is here that I believe superior practitioners step forward. Like an annoying itch, it can be seen as a problem which some will choose to either complain about or just try to ignore. Or, it can be seen as personal challenge. Rather than being frustrated, the risk takers—those who express their commitment with action—try to visualize ways to do something about the perceived problem. They try to envision possibilities. They look at things others have tried. They review others' research on the same topic. They try to imagine how to change their situation. Here is the first and probably the most challenging step. But, it is also the step which leads to new knowledge and, ultimately, to a better field for all of us.

Step one, therefore, begins with trying to identify the *actual* problem and deciding where and how to intervene in the problem. This can take some time to clarify and it can well involve both colleagues and a mentor. There is often a "brainstorming" step here as one thinks through some of the intervention options with others knowledgeable on the issue. A part of this should also involve looking into the literature which already exists to see what has been done on the issue. The AdvancE libraries of the Pennsylvania Department of Education can be contacted to see if they have prior research available and a search at a university or public library of the ERIC data base can be very helpful (see Mekosh-Rosenbaum, n.d., for a discussion of how to use the ERIC data base).

If we move ahead with the study, we must decide if the problem is both

Fig. 1

THE CYCLES OF ACTION RESEARCH



"researchable" and significant for our own work. Is it "doable" and is it going to be worth the effort? If the answers are: "Yes, let's try something," some of the key questions in the beginning Planning Stage are as follows:

- **Analysis:** What actually is "the problem'?" Have I understood why the problem exists? How do others see it? What have others said in the research?
- **Prior research:** Are there prior studies on this very issue?
- **Commitment:** Is this the problem I want to spend time on and will others agree to help?
- **Feasibility:** How can I intervene with a new strategy or approach to see if it would make a difference? What can I do differently? How will I do it?
- **Management:** Can I conduct this project in a way which allows me to manage and observe the activities? Can I manage the influences which will result?

Here is an example of a project I undertook in my own teaching. For some years in my Introduction to Adult Education course—the first class most returning adult graduates take in their Adult Education degree at my university—I would ask the students to read several chapters/articles before class the next week, at which time we would discuss these chapters. This is a classic approach in teaching seminar-style classes. First students read, then they meet to discuss. However, students complained there was too much reading to do. It also seemed (to me) that we did very little "discussing." I ended up quasi-lecturing when I earnestly had hoped we would be talking together about the readings. My view was that I did not want to teach at the graduate level in a "spoon-feeding" lecture fashion. To do so would be boring for me and, I believed, insulting to the experience and intelligence of the adults in the class.

So what was the problem here? I was told (repeatedly) it was the amount of reading. I tried cutting the reading down, semester after semester, but it made little difference. There allegedly was always "too much reading" in this first course. Then, one of the students suggested I give a brief lecture on the topic for the next week—in effect use a "mini-lecture" as an advance organizer. This idea went against my principles since I did not want to lecture. Moreover, it redefined the problem in a less comfortable way. Now it had more to do with me as an effective teacher, and less to do with the students as capable learners. Was something I was doing? Well, since I was basically lecturing anyway I thought I would try it and hope that the discussion would flow from there. Though I doubted it would work, I was willing to try. Especially since the amount of material I needed to cover

was now being compromised with each passing semester and I was getting more and more frustrated.

This example describes an "itch"—too much reading—but it also indicates the length of time it took me to arrive at the decision to try redefining the problem and trying something different. It also indicates the value in having another pair of eyes to help see the nature of the problem. It is not uncommon for the practitioner to have to face the possibility that he/she is part of the problem. And, it is not uncommon for the defining of the problem to take awhile. Action research students I have had since have taken months to gather facts and determine the problem which they wanted to work on. One nurse-trainer working in an intensive care unit in a hospital needed to keep a log for weeks to determine if, in fact, nurses were washing their hands between treating the ICU patients? Was there a problem? Was it significant? Was it worth working on? Getting the problem and the intervention straight is critical to a successful outcome. Again, try to involve a sympathetic but informed friend or colleague as you try to figure out the problem and your best-hunch intervention.

2. Conceptualizing the Intervention

In this second step of the Planning Phase, we conceptualize what we can try to do to intervene and make a change. The questions typically are:

- **Initiating:** When and how should I begin the project?
- **Informing:** How will I inform or involve those in the project?
- **Approving:** Whose approvals will I need and how will I get the participants' consent?
- **Resources:** Will I need any other resources or other personal preparation?

In my case, I decided to try the "mini-lecture" in the next semester's Introduction to Adult Education course. I decided to tell the class that I wanted to see which method they liked best after a two-month trial period. I gained assurance from the students that no one objected to the project. The first month involved the old discussion method; the second month involved the mini-lecture approach. At the two-month point, it would be time for the midterm test. I described the project to everyone and, of course, had to prepare succinct mini-lectures on what were the highlights and issues of week's upcoming readings. I decided to give both a synopsis of the material for the graduate students to read and some discussion questions to consider for the next week.

3. Developing Measures

If one is to have a sense of whether or not something is actually "better," we need to know where we started. "Better" involves a comparison: better compared to what? Unlike daily teaching or administration where we just go ahead and try something, this system asks that we take some time to evaluate what it is we are *now* doing and *with what results*—creating a documented baseline for later comparison. The intervention, we hope, will bring about results better than what we are showing now in the baseline.

Another consideration is, how long should we run the experiment? What is a fair trial period? We need a **timeline**. Unlike everyday practice where we simply try something for an indefinite period and have no real point to stop and see if things have actually changed, action research says we need to set a timeline where we stop and reflect on whether this approach is better or not. Finally, if we are to try something new, we need to decide what will be considered a "successful" outcome. Unlike everyday practice, where investment of time (resources and ego) often seems to justify continuing a practice even if it doesn't seem to be any better, or even worse, we need to be able to get to a point of pause for informed reflection. At this point, we need to be able to say we met the criteria for success we set down in the planning stage, or that we are on the road to meeting it. Not all new ideas or interventions pay off and some don't give us the degree of success we need. So what are realistic success criteria for the project?

Typical questions here include:

- **Compare:** How will the new approach be compared to the old approach?
- **Weigh:** On what basis will the results be weighed at project end?
- **Criteria:** What change will be acceptable for success?
- **Data:** How will I observe the project in a systematic way?
- **A colleague friend:** With whom can I discuss this plan along the way and who will help assess it at the conclusion?
- **Timeline:** For exactly how long should I run the project?

It is important to develop several ways to collect data. If this is possible, the results will be more meaningful and hold greater validity. This is what is called *triangulation* in qualitative research. How? A list of some of the possible ways to collect data follow this discussion (Appendix B), but some of the standard ways to collect data in action research are: noting and then comparing the results of *tests* of knowledge, noting the number of days attended, etc. *Records* like this are very useful. If you do not have them, developing a log to keep careful track of what outcomes are can help a lot.

Keeping a record and comparing how many times things happen is a vital part of action research. *Interviews* conducted by yourself or, perhaps, by another—which will often improve objectivity—can be invaluable. *Field notes*—ongoing notes on what you observe while it is happening—can be a good source for data collection. Also, *anecdotal records* can be kept. This means jotting down incidents, or anecdotes, which may seem to have no pattern at the time but can reveal patterns later. *Audio recordings or video taping* can be invaluable. My bias is that all action researchers and/or participants should keep a reflective *journal* right from the beginning. We tend to forget what we thought last week, or observed yesterday. A reflective journal is the one method I encourage *all* action researchers to undertake.

If you are to conduct action research, the full knowledge of the participants is a standard requirement. *Also, it may be a requirement of your institution that a signed document of consent is needed from each participant before you begin.* Such "informed consent" signatures are required by most universities and colleges in compliance with federal regulations. You need to ascertain how this approval needs to be attained in your institutional setting.

Typical questions in this step include:

- **Data collection:** How will action and change be observed and documented?
- **Informed consent:** What type of participant consent does my institution require?
- **Participant awareness:** How will I explain the project to the participants and what will I do if some do not want to participate?

My example was an in-class project and unanimous consent was gained from all of the students in advance. A questionnaire used at the end of the project compared how the students felt about the old and new approach to the readings.

A second measure was the mid-term test data, which compared the scores of this year's mid-term with previous classes' mid-terms. Since it is possible that I had an unusual group this year, I created my baseline for comparison on the previous three years' mid-term test results.

Third, I asked students to keep a journal and turn it in with their reflections on the two methods at the mid-point. I kept one too. I noted observations after each class meeting, such as the comparative quality of the discussions in month one as opposed to month two.

Finally, I asked an in-class volunteer Feedback Committee of three students to give me verbal feedback during and after the project ended. This was a system for anonymous feedback from any of the students that wanted

to talk with the committee during class breaks, etc. rather than talk to me as instructor (it is a system which works well with graduate classes regardless of the course content).

Here, then, were five data-collection instruments within four methods to triangulate and compare the old with the new intervention.

Typically, the more methods for collecting and then cross-referencing data, the better the triangulation and the higher the validity (Merriam, 1991). Here, I had five ways to collect data planned. In general, I recommend at least three systems be involved, such as journals; test results, records, or logs; and questionnaires or interviews conducted by yourself or by a third party.

Cycle One: The Action Stage

4. Implementing the Plan

Now comes the actual doing—the action. It requires good prior planning. And, done well, it should be the most interesting stage. Why? It feels satisfying to at least try to do something better—to satisfy the "itch." If the participants are fully involved, what used to be a problem is now a project, with wider ownership for all concerned.

The type of questions for this stage may be as follows:

- **Consistency:** Am I staying true to the initial plan?
- **Consistency:** Am I collecting the data the way I said I would?
- **Consistency:** Am I keeping close track of what is going on through the data collection systems I have?
- **Support:** Am I keeping in touch with my colleague both for my own support in seeing the project through and to begin formulating ideas for what may be the next iteration of the project?"

In my own example, every student said the mini-lecture helped in every respect. I was able to look at the mean score of the midterm test as compared to previous years. It was considerably higher. The Feedback Committee was unanimous in saying the project was a success. And, I knew that the quality of the discussing had gone up. People were better prepared and more confident, and I saw more thinking arising out of the mini-lecture material which led to new student insights from the readings.

Cycle One: The Reflection Stage

5. The Evaluation Step

At the end of the timeline, and with the friend(s) involved along the way, here is the point at which you need to sit down with a colleague and actually look at the data collected. To just say "Things seem to be better" is not enough. Studying the data is the last and most important step. What do the data have to say? Were the criteria for success met? How far are you from attaining it? What do others think about the project? What are the tangible gains, if any? This is the point where evaluation is needed to determine just how successful the project has been, thus far.

6. The Reflection Step and Preparing for Cycle Two

Further questions have to do with the overall promise of the project. Questions such as, "How would this work better another time?" And, "If there is promise to the approach, should there be another cycle?" need to be asked. If it is successful, it is important to consider conducting the same test or a variation on it again because the capacity to see the same results with repeated tests of the intervention increases the validity of the study. And, it is worthwhile to ask: "Can someone else now try what you have found?" The ability to have this repeated by others takes your findings to a higher level of generalizability and begins to make them a true contribution of verified knowledge in the field.

Typically, the reflection stage is commonly the weakest one for teachers/tutors and administrators. Why? We are often so busy in our jobs that we usually do not allow ourselves time to reflect, to really look back. This is perhaps a cultural phenomenon—the cultural necessity to be active and producing rather than being reflective—but it a serious shortcoming if we are to make professional gains in our own work or advance the field overall. Others want to know the results of your work, and they will want to try the experiment too. Be assured that despite the feeling that what we do is somehow unique from what others do, there is more than enough in common among practitioners to make your outcomes of interest. Even if your project is only a partial success, or an outright failure, we at least know that going in that direction is apparently less promising than going in another.

Therefore, the type of questions that often are asked in the reflection stage include:

- **Accuracy:** Did the changes observed actually reflect what happened?
- **Outcomes:** Did the new method or idea make a measurable difference?
- **Criteria:** Was the difference sufficient to meet the criteria set?
- **Repetition:** How can I repeat this or have this repeated to develop more validity?

- **The future:** Will I try another cycle?

To conclude my example, I felt this small project was a great success. It changed the way I teach this course and, I believe it has helped both me and the students since. But, at the time, I had to ask if it was a valid test. Could it be that this was just because I had a class which responded well to mini-lecture? Could the outcomes be because of something else? Perhaps the students saw that I wanted them to do better during the mini-lecture stage, so they just worked harder out of respect for my wishes. I decided to try it again next class, this time with the mini-lecture in the *first* month, the old method in the *second.* The results were the same. Incidentally, I was to give a presentation on a promising teaching technique at the meeting of Adult Education Professors that Fall. I gave the results of the project and asked others to try it. Two did and I heard later that students preferred the mini-lecture and performed better in similar introductory courses at their universities too. Here is the increased ever-widening verification which raises the validity of the project.

To conclude, would this approach work in senior courses—those beyond the Introduction class? I tried the mini-lecture with two senior-level classes but found that the mini-lectures are successful with new (e.g., newly returning adult) students, not the senior ones. Apparently, since senior-level students usually organize themselves well, know better how to read materials, and are more confident or "socialized" to discussion-based classes, the senior students actually felt a bit patronized by the mini-lecture. So, I now have enough reason to think that this method works well with adults *newly returning* to graduate classes where academic organization skills are needed but are "rusty." Was the problem "too much reading?" What do you think?

IV. POSSIBLE PRACTITIONER QUESTIONS FOR ACTION RESEARCH

What are the possibilities for practice? Since so much of what we do in our literacy field is basically "learning on the job," there is a tendency to place great value in what is inheriting, both in terms of others' materials and others' advice. On the other hand, there is often a natural tendency to "go with the flow"—not to try new ideas or, if we do, to undervalue their significance. Whether this is an accurate depiction of the situation or not, I think most will agree that if we could learn more effectively from the successes of others and have better ways to test and share our own work, our field would be the richer for it.

Adult literacy practitioners who have taken my action research courses over the past couple of years have, for instance, investigated new methods for teaching specific science, English, and math content. In several projects, teachers have compared their new approaches with the methods they inherited from other adult teachers, or from schooling practice. One ABE English teacher tested peer-teaching for essay writing in English classes as compared to her previous teacher-centered presentations. Another set up a project to find the most popular novels in her program and began to build a "reading tree" to instill more excitement in reading.

The majority have studied ways to deal with retention. One action researcher compared the effect of a student support group in a literacy tutoring program with the common one-on-one model. Others have experimented to see if retention improves by having a student "buddy-system." Several have tested to see if increased counselor contact makes a difference to retention, and others have tried increased tutor-contact hours. Some have compared small literacy tutor groups with one-on-one tutoring. New ways to recruit students have been tried. A GED program at a correctional center has experimented with involving certain prison staff and guards in recruitment. Another in a corrections setting managed to move the program to continuous intake instead of weekly intake (the rigidity of the rules in such settings can make projects difficult to set up). Outside of literacy, a minister/adult educator has used action research to try new methods to recruit participants into adult religious classes with the help of an internal committee of the congregation.

In several of these cases, the researchers are presenting their findings at state conferences or at regional workshops. We hope some of these will be sharing their projects through the state monographs in this very project.

However, the possibilities do not end here. Literacy practitioners have not only tried new methods and techniques, but have tried very fundamental changes based on different teaching philosophies. One had always been told that her learners had little to contribute to the planning and managing of ABE courses. Course syllabi were given out, no input was sought from learners. As a result, she had taken all the responsibility with little ownership or involvement by the learners once the course had begun. After trying a student planning committee for early input, she compared the collected journals, grades and the results both from her own observations and those of a fellow teacher with past courses. She found the project lead her to increased participation and higher grades.

It would be most valuable for teachers and administrators to test the stereotypes we inherit on low-literacy adults. For instance: What actually are the self-esteem levels of learners in and out of the classroom?[1] What are the self-esteem levels exhibited given different types of learner ownership

in courses? How does learner self-esteem change when classes have field trips, open discussions, debates?[2] For literacy teachers who may place vocational and job preparation above self-esteem issues as a program goal: Why not compare job location experience with no such "site experience"? Why not test for vocabulary transfer to a job? How effective is the use of computers and other technology in helping recruit and retain males in a job location, or away from it?

For those who lean towards a liberal and enrichment orientation for their learners: Does the teaching of classic literature in high-interest/low-vocabulary books increase reading interest overall? What are the best books to use across common situations? What is the success level with students developing their own materials? Can problem-solving case studies be tested to see if reading increases or if critical thinking skills are enhanced? Finally, for the literacy educator interested in learner empowerment: Why not compare retention rates and/or cognitive gain around student action advocacy projects, such as working as a group to change a life problem? An example with which I have experience is when two African American learners felt that their landlord was discriminating against them. They were apparently receiving higher rent increases than other tenants. They organized a set of advocacy steps with their instructor and classmates to investigate this question. They raised both legal questions and constituent questions at the city council level. Their rent went back down. Would addressing such real-life problems increase retention? What is the impact of involving real problems for teaching?

V. CONCLUSION: THE WIDER VALUE OF ACTION RESEARCH

Beyond Accountability

We often need to do more than just "do a good job." We very often need to account for what we do. This can be an all-consuming task and it can seem that all of our energy and resources are needed just to keep things as they are. But, advances and improvements can arise from accountability activities. We often want to make changes, try new approaches, and challenge old ideas, but we have no time. We often need new resources to make change possible, but there are no new resources. Or are there? Whether accounting for what we do, trying something new, or making a case for new resources, the matter often comes down to whether or not we have a strong case. And, we often lack the evidence—the data—to show that resources can be allocated in better ways. We often cannot show improved cost-effectiveness results or better retention because we do not have the data and

we lack the ways to gain verified evidence that new creative ways can make a difference. Anecdotes and statements of need are rarely good enough to justify serious change at the institutional or policy level. From local boards to the federal government, we need to be able to convince decision-makers that we can make improvements. Verified research makes an enormous difference.

Action research is "hands-on" research which every teacher-administrator can do. This approach empowers teachers, tutors, and administrators to take common problems in different parts of the state and try a similar approach, continually comparing action research outcomes along the way, continually sharing and ultimately developing a range of tested, replicated answers. A critical mass of data can suggest which new approaches are more promising than all the old ones. A case can be made to boards based on such regional or statewide data. And, internally, we can gain new ways to talk about common problems.

Action research, widely shared, provides the basic research tools to move ahead on common concerns. Here then, is the promise of real empowerment and real professional development for long-term impact in our state.

So, good luck with your project. Remember, as learners and students, simply to try is *always* worthwhile. ■

[1] For a discussion of self-esteem literature and examples of self-esteem tests in literacy programs, see Beder, 1991.

[2] For ideas on creating a participatory classroom and seeing a humanist philosophy at work, see Fingeret & Jurmo, 1989.

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APPENDIX A

Techniques for Monitoring Action Research and Collecting Data

- **Anecdotal records:** Written, descriptive accounts of incidents. These may accumulate until a broader picture or pattern emerges. Typically used to note a particular or repeating occurrence with a group or individual.

- **Field notes:** Similar to the above but the researcher's impressions and interpretations are added at the same time. Field notes may cover a broader range of observations then anecdotal records. They are typically written at the location of the event.

- **Document analysis:** Documents typically included agency records, written reports, letters, memos, published materials at the locale and learner reports or notes. These are particularly useful in trying to establish a baseline of what has actually happened in the past and can be invaluable in comparing a new approach to the past.

- **Logs:** Typically, these are careful records of recurring activities. Often numerical, examples include records of attendance, the number of times learners do certain things, or the time allocation of groups. Commentary with the numerical entries can also be useful in building observed data.

- **Journals:** An invaluable tool for keeping a record of one's reflections. These are typically written on a regular basis at the end of the day, for instance, or when there is a relative calm after the passage time. It allows one to express feelings, anxieties, and comments on events which have taken place or which one anticipates. This technique is particularly helpful in action research because events and activities can change so much during a project that one can easily forget one's thoughts and feelings. Looking back during the reflection stage is usually enriched by reflective journals kept either by the researcher and/or the participants.

- **Portfolio:** A collection of relevant materials compiled for a purpose. This is effectively a purposeful file of everything which may seem relevant to an issue. Learner papers, grades, relevant staff minutes, research articles, correspondence—any relevant item which should be kept for later review.

Appendix A, Continued

- **Questionnaires:** Written sets of questions requiring written responses. These are typically of two types:

  - *Open:* asking for opinions or information in the participants' own words using an open-ended question. Especially useful for exploratory or subjective reactions but they can be difficult to analyze.

  - *Closed:* This may be multiple choice or direct short answer response but it seeks specific information with little room for the respondent's interpretations. Especially useful for collecting specific information.

- **Interviews:** They allow for interaction and are usually considered superior to questionnaires when the issues may be emotionally charged or when the participants may have difficulty or even hostility towards a written instrument. Either the interviewer or a third party can be the researcher. The issue here is how the interviewer him/herself may inhibit an open exchange with the participant. These are often categorized into three types:

  - *Structured:* Useful when seeking specific information on specific topics. This leaves little room for discussion beyond the given questions. And, if the interviewee begins to stray, the interviewer should bring him/her directly back to the question.

  - *Semi-structured:* Involves asking more open-ended questions to several participants but allows the interviewee to go further than the precise question with opinions, thoughts, and questions. Often written "probes" are used. These are reminders on the interview schedule of opening questions for the interviewer to go to specific related aspects of the question after the opening response. For instance, the opening question might be: "How did you learn about this program?" After the general response, the interviewer could probe by asking if he/she ever heard about it in the media or through word-of-mouth the other possibilities around this question which the interviewee might not have mentioned or thought of.

  - *Open:* Like the open questionnaire, this encourages open discussion and wide-ranging opinion with very little direction on the interviewer's part. Again, the analysis of the collected data can be difficult here but the technique can open many areas the interviewer did not previously think of.

Appendix A, Continued

- **Audio and video recording:** Valuable for getting an exact record of events, one which can reveal pauses, expressions, idioms or body language. Since recording involves the use of mechanical devices, the person operating even a "simple" tape recorder needs to check and double-check the equipment beforehand. If it is to be used as part of an interview, the researcher needs to give careful thought to the interview questions beforehand (see *Interviews*).

- **Tests of learner performance:** Objective or subjective tests of student achievement are the standard method of evaluating performance and diagnosing needs. These can be invaluable for pre-post tests to help determine change.

APPENDIX B

Examples of Research Inquiry Models in Adult Education

Quantitative	Qualitative or Naturalistic		
Experimental and Descriptive	**Ethnographic**	**Historical**	**Philosophical**
• Experimental • Quasi-experimental	• Case study • Action research • Participatory • Grounded theory	• Primary • Secondary • Biographic	• Phenomenology • Phenomenography

ACTION RESEARCH PLANNER

Developing a Plan

Planning Phase:

Problem?

1. What is the Problem? (Try to state in one sentence.)

2. What are the most obvious reasons for/causes of the Problem?

3. In general terms, what are the hoped-for benefits?

Planning Phase, Continued

Project?

4. Describe the *proposed* intervention in general terms.

5. When will you begin? Explain why.

6. What materials/equipment will you need? Explain why.

7. Whose approval(s) will you need?

Planning Phase, Continued

8. How will you inform the participants?

9. Which colleagues will discuss and evaluate your work?

Planning Phase, Continued

Measure?

10. Specify the current/past baseline to be used as a point of comparison (e.g., how it will be collected?).

11. Specify the Criteria for Success to be evaluated against (describe reasons for these criteria).

12. What is the **timeline** for the evaluation?

Planning Phase, Continued

13. Specify the methods to be used to collect the data.

14. What might discourage you from finishing this project?

Action Phase:

15. Provide a **summary** of the data collected.

Reflection Phase:

Evaluation

16. Provide a summary of the reflection outcomes following the first two phases:

17. Will you enter a second cycle of the project? If not, discuss why not. If you will, use a second copy of this document.

APPENDIX B

ACTION UPDATE

Volume I, No. 1
November, 1995

Action Research Project Begins

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ACTION UPDATE
Editor: A. Quigley
Staff Writer: D. Fetterman

For information contact:

Action Research Project
— 412/372-6868 —
Raiana Mearns,
Receptionist/Assistant
Monday-Thursday,
1:00-3:00 P.M.

Get Involved

Do you have difficulty resolving certain sticky problems in your work? Are there learners with whom you would like to be more effective? "Yes," you say? Then this call to "Get involved" is for YOU!

The Pennsylvania Department of Education has announced a statewide initiative involving teachers, tutors, counselors, and administrators. This is a project that is designed to provide a new approach to staff development. It will put the practitioner (YOU) in charge of creating new knowledge for his or her own organization. There will also be opportunity to share what is learned across the field so that others can benefit, too. The initiative is the Action Research Project originating from Pittsburgh.

Action Research is a system of problem-solving and knowledge building. One begins with a specific issue or problem question that needs to be resolved. The research question can relate to an individual or a group (such as your organization).

Once the topic of the study has been defined, the researcher then designs a practical procedure for addressing the problem or issue that was previously described. There needs to be an evaluative process built into the project so that the researcher determines if the question has been addressed satisfactorily. If not, action research provides for the original procedure being revised based on the evaluations with revision being implemented. The process can continue in this cyclical fashion until the researcher is satisfied with the results.

But how to get involved? Read on!

What have others done?

Examples of action research projects from across the state of Pennsylvania include:

- "How best to retain students?"
- "How best to recruit students?"
- "How to teach certain course content more effectively?"
- "How to reach and involve more volunteers in literacy tutoring?"
- "How best to train new board members?"
- "How effective community-wide collaboratives can be formed."

How can YOU benefit by participating?

You will benefit because you will be:

- Mentored throughout the process.
- Assisted in defining a problem in your setting around which the project will be conducted.
- Guided and supported as you experiment with different problem-solving strategies.

In addition, you . . .

- . . . will receive a grant for completing a monograph reporting on a successful project.
- . . .will see your completed monograph shared across the state.
- . . .will be invited to meet with other action researchers at the COABE Conference in Pittsburgh in May 1996.
- . . .will become a part of the Pennsylvania Action Research Network and Project Data Base enabling you to be in contact with others who are working on the same or similar problems and issues.
- . . .will be able to help the field evolve professionally across Pennsylvania.

How can people across Pennsylvania benefit from YOU being a participant?

Your participation will benefit people across the state, practitioners and learners alike. Because of your work, new answers can be found to questions asked by many. Because of your work, new solutions to mutual problems can be discovered. Because of your work, new knowledge can be created. We can truly help one another to solve problems, to learn, and to improve our practice. By YOU participating, people across the state of Pennsylvania are beneficiaries.

What do YOU have to do to be involved?

If you are based in Pittsburgh:

Allan Quigley (the Project Director) and Drucie Weirauch (a Project Team Member) will meet with practitioners who have expressed interest in conducting an action research project at Goodwill Industries. This is intensive training that will begin with meetings once a week in late October later moving to meetings once every 2 weeks and finally meeting fewer times each month as the projects progress. It is okay to join after October. **Participants will need the approval of their program director.**

If you are based in Erie:

Allan Quigley and Gary Kuhne (a Project Team Member) will meet at the Northwest Tri-County IU #5 with interested practitioners using a format and time sequence similar to the one that Allan and Drucie are using in Pittsburgh. Again, this begins in late October but you can still join. **Participants will need the approval of their program director.**

If you are based in Regions 1 or 4:

If you cannot travel to the Goodwill Industries site in Pittsburgh or the IU in Erie, David Fetterman (a Project Team Member) will meet with interested groups of five or more (provided the program is outside of Pittsburgh and Erie). **Participants will need the approval of their program director as well as the Regional Staff Development Center.**

These groups will meet with David for an initial training session in the principles of Action Research (including how to define a research question). This introductory session will last about three hours. After this initial session David will provide follow up with these individuals and groups via telephone conferences.

If you are based in Regions 3 and 7:

Kathy Kalinosky (a Project Team Member and coordinator of the database of project participants) will meet with interested groups of five or more. She is especially accessible to participants from the Scranton area. **The approval of the program director as well as the Regional Staff Development Center is again needed.** The format for the initial session as well as the follow-up telephone conferences is the same as for Regions 1 and 4.

If you are based in Regions 2 and 5:

Linda Ritchey (a Project Team Member and monograph editor for project participants) will meet with interested groups of five or more. **The approval of the program director as well as the Regional Staff Development Center is again needed.** The format for the initial session as well as the follow-up telephone conferences is the same as for the regions in which David and Kathy (above) are working.

All participants (regardless of the training they attend) will receive a copy of the Action Research Handbook and Planner by Allan Quigley. *WHAT IS THE FIRST STEP? Call Raiana Mearns at 412/372-6868 for details, times, schedules, and an application. AND be sure to apply for approval to your Director.*

Do YOU have the time?

In our busy lives so much seeks our time and attention. Will this project, and the knowledge that it hopes to create, be worth the time and effort?

Most action research projects take one to two months to complete. The length varies depending on the problem that is being considered. In determining the time that you are willing to commit, weigh the cost against the benefits to your organization, not to mention your practice and the experience of your clients. It is a small investment considering the benefit of bringing solutions to current problems, as well as contributing to the knowledge of others.

Remember . . .

The project begins in late October and continues to April. Contact the Action Research Project soon *(Monday - Thursday, noon-3:00 p.m., at 412/372-6868)*! Ask for Raiana.

Also, in Regions 6, 8, and 9:

As part of PDE's state-wide Staff Development Initiative, the Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Network (PALPIN) is facilitating the formation of inquiry seminars in Regions 6 and 8. Growing out of PALPIN, the Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Project in Region 9, this project is aimed at encouraging practitioners to improve teaching, tutoring, and administering by forming professional communities to explore participants' own interests and concerns. They will meet on a regular basis to read, write, and talk about their practice and current research literature. PALPIN will host a four-day Winter Inquiry Institute in Philadelphia (1/24-27/1996). for practitioners from all regions of the state. Contact Alisa Belzer, Project Director, at 215/898-8865 (e-mail belzera@dolphin.upenn.edu).

ACTION UPDATE

Volume 1 Issue 2
February, 1996

What's Happening in the Statewide Action Research Network

Pennsylvania Action Research & Practitioner Inquiry Networks: Up and Running!

Things are happening!

Since the last issue of *Action Update* much has been happening in the Statewide Action Research and Practitioner Inquiry Networks. People have been busy! Groups are formed and working in Erie, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and the Harrisburg area. Others are beginning their work in Johnstown and Beaver in the west, and the Radnor area in the east.

This issue will share what has been occurring in the Statewide Action Research Network in the Erie and Pittsburgh groups, as well as in the Practitioner Inquiry Network. Finally, you will learn about a COABE Pre-Conference.

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Monday-Thursday, 1:00-3:00 P.M.

What's happening in... Erie?

Dr. Gary Kuhne has been working with a group in Erie to design and implement Action Research projects. Some of the topics that they will be researching are:

- Reorganizing instruction so ABE students can be more aware of their own visible progress toward defined academic goals
- Reducing drop outs from ABE waiting lists & improving retention through implementing a small group tutoring system
- Increasing willingness of tutors to tutor ABE math through tutor instruction & personal interviews
- Using a structured "buddy system" to increase retention of ABE students
- Using learner-mentors to increase retention of ABE students
- Using additional forms of assessment to measure gains in students with developmental challenges
- Increasing ABE enrollments through the use of 1)current students as recruiters, & 2) development of a special "Bring a Friend Day"
- Using prolonged educational intervention (1-to-1 tutoring) to enable stroke victims to make gains in reading comprehension/word recognition skills

Special Focus on . . .

Marcia Anderson, a participant in the Erie group, was attracted to the project because she "saw this project as an opportunity to work with literacy providers on issues relating to adult education." She adds that it "is an excellent opportunity for small, low-budget volunteer agencies to access information and expertise which is beneficial to everyone involved in the field of adult education."

Now that she has been in the project for several months she can see benefits for her participation. She observed: "The process of Action Research provides the opportunity to brainstorm ideas and topics which are relevant to the participants. The process provides focus and structure and allows one to develop a strategy for the project undertaken. It gives the participants an opportunity to try a project and be able to make it work through the process of reflection and by refining strategy."

What's happening in... Pittsburgh?

Drucie Weirauch has been working with a group in Pittsburgh to design and implement Action Research projects. Some of the topics that they will be researching are:

- Helping students in literacy programs to set and achieve realistic goals by establishing weekly instructor/student interviews
- Improving motivation to complete assignments by providing high-interest ethnic reading materials that

contain examples of self-esteem, respect, self-reliance, & success
- Improving retention & resolving personal problems outside of school by instituting a regularly scheduled student support group
- Reducing time on waiting lists (& improving student satisfaction & retention) by offering alternative small group literacy sessions in addition to existing one-on-one tutoring sessions
- Increasing recruitment into the Gateway Program by hosting a 3 day open house to informally discuss potential participants' needs & concerns
- Increasing return of tutor's Monthly Progress Reports by changing the format of the progress report form & establishing weekly collaborative completion of form by tutor & student

Special Focus on . . .

Being in the project in Pittsburgh, enabled participant ***Debbie Thompson*** to have "an opportunity to develop a new approach to an old procedure which needed some redirection " She believes that Action Research will allow her to 1) "devise a new process for data collection from our volunteers and students," 2) "select the methods which I deemed best for monitoring the process," and 3) "direct the process toward satisfactory results "

Like Marcia Anderson, Debbie Thompson is discovering benefits with Action Research She has discovered that "Most helpful about the Action Research Project is its cyclical nature Adjustments to the original design of the project can be made at any stage If the first set of data collected is not satisfactory, a second phase can be initiated and changes implemented This procedure can continue until the desired results are obtained Unlike traditional research, new ideas, changes, adjustments and redirection are encouraged at any point necessary to make the project a success "

For more information on these topics from the Pittsburgh and Erie groups, and to be in touch with the researchers, contact Raiana Mearns at the Pennsylvania Action Research Network office (412/372-6868).

And from the Philadelphia-based Practitioner Inquiry Project . . .

The Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Network (PALPIN) is working in 3 different ways this year: by offering year-long inquiry seminars in Region 6 & 8, and by holding the Winter Inquiry Institute in late January

In Region 6, 16 participants meet monthly to read, write, and talk about their practice with small groups meeting between all-group meetings Says Alisa Belzer, Project Director: "The activities we are engaging in are designed to help us uncover some of our assumptions about teaching, learning and literacy as a way of arriving at inquiry questions to be investigated "

In Region 8, the 13 participants will meet as a whole group 5 times throughout the year with each of the 13 being paired with an "inquiry mentor" who has participated in 2 or more inquiry groups already These mentoring pairs will do much of the inquiry work between all-group sessions

Special Focus on . . .

Karen Bergey, a PALPIN participant, observes that she was attracted to this project because she saw this as "an opportunity to share concerns with other adult educators from within the region, not just with those in her own organization " That wider interaction will broaden her knowledge

Ms Bergey has received benefits already in the form of a renewed opportunity to reflect on her own teaching practices and the need to read current adult education literature due to her accountability to the Project Director, as well as to the rest of the group As their project continues, she looks forward to the opportunity to devote concentrated time to researching a specific topic

An Opportunity before COABE -- May 15 Pre-Conference.

"Learning from Our Own Practice: Practitioner Inquiry & Action Research for New Knowledge and Improved Practice" is a special Pre-Conference being held in Pittsburgh on May 15, 1996, the day before COABE '96 convenes Among the topics to be considered will be:
- literacy and basic education
- finding new solutions for literacy, ABE, and ESL problems
- enhancing practitioner communication via new networks
- improving practitioner collaboration on common problems

This pre-conference was requested by and will be facilitated by 3 experts in the field: Allan Quigley (PA Action Research Network), Alisa Belzer (PA Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Network), and Sue Cockley (Virginia Action Research Project)

Planners have designed this to be an informal meeting that will provide maximum opportunity for participants to pose problems and discover ways to work together As the COABE brochure encourages: "All action researchers -- present and future -- are more than welcome to learn more about this exciting new approach to knowledge development and professional growth "

Tentative schedule for the day will be:

8:00-9:30 a m : Registration
9:30-10:30 a m : Breakfast
10:30 a m -12:30p m :Sessions
12:30-1:30 p m : Lunch
1:30-5:30p m Sessions

Tentative costs for the event will be:
- $25 00(which includes breakfast & coffee) with a COABE '96 registration, or
- $35 00(also including breakfast & coffee) if you are *not* registering for COABE '96

Watch for COABE advertising and brochures through the coming months ***Hope to see you there!***

BUREAU OF ADULT BASIC & LITERACY EDUCATION
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Special Project

Volume 1, No. 3
May 1996

Action Update

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE STATEWIDE ACTION RESEARCH NETWORK

Action Research ... Helping People Learn, Increasing Knowledge

HERE AND BEYOND

The first two issues of ACTION UPDATE focused largely on what is happening within our own state of Pennsylvania. We've focused on the Pennsylvania Action Research Network (PA-ARN) based in Pittsburgh, and on the Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Network (PALPIN) based in Philadelphia.

There is, however, much significant action research being done outside of our Commonwealth. In this issue we will again highlight several projects happening in Pennsylvania.

Also featured will be some action research being done in other parts of the Eastern United States.

ACTION UPDATE

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This publication is available in alternative media on request.

Action Research... At Work in Pennsylvania

The last issue of ACTION UPDATE featured the PA-ARN groups in Erie and Pittsburgh. Since that time three more groups have begun their work. From east to west the new PA-ARN groups are meeting at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, the Hiram G. Andrews Center in Johnstown, and Adult Literacy Action in Beaver.

In Bethlehem:

Three action researchers, led by PA-ARN team member Kathy Kalinosky, began their work at Lehigh University. Their project topics are:

- How can I more effectively teach critical reading skills to adult students?
- How will the addition of classroom tests affect students' sense of progress?
- How can I increase consistent attendance in daily ESL classes?

Group Leader Kathy Kalinosky observed: "At the conclusion of workshop training, participants felt empowered that action research was something they could immediately put to use. They seemed amazed at how practical it was and relieved they wouldn't need to spend hours in the library poring over volumes of research information to find their answers. Instead the answers were within them and their students."

In Johnstown:

PA-ARN team member Linda Ritchey has been working with four action researchers at the Hiram G. Andrews Center in Johnstown. In this group three of the researchers formed a team and conducted the project:

- Improving attendance of adult learners.

The fourth researcher's project is:

- Increasing baseline competency of hearing impaired/deaf adults.

Reflecting on the success of these researchers and their work, Linda Ritchey wrote: "Both projects are completed, and results and outcomes are being evaluated. Both studies are motivational and student driven."

In Beaver:

David Fetterman, PA-ARN team member, has been working with two action researchers out of Adult Literacy Action in Beaver. Projects being conducted out of that center are:

- Helping ESL learners to develop skills in pronouncing English sounds more effectively.
- Enabling learners to develop understanding and critical thinking skills to improve reader comprehension.

The second of these projects is unique among current PA-ARN work in that it is being conducted in a correctional institution.

Considering these projects, David Fetterman reflects: "The findings of these researchers, even the obstacles encountered in providing education in a corrections setting, will be helpful to practitioners as our knowledge base is broadened through them."

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Action Research ... At Work Outside Of Pennsylvania

In New York:

In December 1995, the Community and Rural Development Institute at Cornell University (Ithaca, NY) featured the Cornell Participatory Action Research Network in their issue of *Innovations in Community & Rural Development.* This will summarize that article. Quotations are from the article as well.

Citing the purpose of PAR, *Innovations* said that it was formed to "facilitate dialogue and encourage programming for outreach, training, and theoretical discourse across the university." The Cornell PAR Network serves as a link for several community-based projects. PAR participants are enabled "to learn principles and techniques from cutting edge programs in fields as diverse as natural resource management, education, industrial and labor relations, and local governance."

In addition, every semester there is a seminar series on the Cornell campus. Its purpose is to bring together leading PAR practitioners and theorists from all over the world. The Research Consultation Program is another PAR facet that "allows people involved in PAR projects (on or off campus) to present their work in a small group formed to creatively reflect on the issues and possibilities of the research process."

The Cornell PAR Network is also a worldwide venture. As of the writing of the December 1995 *Innovations* article, over 1,000 people from around the world were linked to PAR. A volunteer effort, the Cornell PAR Network has no paid staff.

Anyone may participate in an electronic discussion group, PARtalk-L, by sending an e-mail message to "listproc@cornell.edu" with the command "SUBPARtalk-L Your Own Name" in the message body.

For more information contact: The Cornell PAR Network, 214 Warren Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853-7801. Phone: 607/255-1967. Fax: 607/255-9984. E-mail: PARnet@cornell.edu.

In Virginia:

"The Virginia Adult Educator's Research Network is a state-wide staff development project," says program director Sue Cockley. "Our mission is to promote reflective practice among adult educators in our state through engagement with research."

Participants share in two categories of activities: doing research and reading/reflecting on research. "For our purposes," Sue Cockley continues, "both doing and reading place practitioners in a thoughtful mode, more aware of what they are doing, how well it is, or is not, working and why that may be."

This network produces three publications: *The Year in Review,* a compilation of the year's practitioner reports; *The Summer Reading List,* reviews by ten practitioners of five professional or adult education books; and *The Adult Education Reader,* containing reprinted articles (reprinted after obtaining permission to do so), selected by five or six practitioners, that are tied together on a single theme (these readers can then be used by teachers as discussion starters. The purpose of these publications is to make research more accessible to practitioners.

The network has a research grant program in which teachers may apply individually or as a group. Applicants identify a researchable question and determine basic data collection methods that they will use. The project director meets several times with each researcher to help clarify issues from the research and to continue to refine and implement the projects.

Participants in the grant program are expected to write a report that is published in *The Year in Review* and submitted to ERIC, as well as orally present their findings where possible.

For more information: Sue Cockley, The Research Network, PO Box 10, Dayton, VA 22821. Phone: 540/879-2732. E-mail: cockley1@muvms6.mu.wvnet.edu.

★★★ COABE Note ★★★

Sue Cockley, along with Alisa Belzer and Allan Quigley, will be providing leadership at the May 15 Action Research COABE Pre-Conference in Pittsburgh.

In Georgia:

Cassandra Drennon of the University of Georgia writes of action research in that state:

"Literacy South, with funding from the UPS Foundation, is currently directing the Georgia Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Network (GALPIN). The 16 GALPIN participants are adult literacy teachers, program administrators, and directors of local literacy organizations who mostly practice in counties spread throughout rural Georgia. As an inquiry community, the participants meet five times over the course of two years for intensive two-day retreats. The retreats generally occur in a rustic state park setting ... Although the retreat sessions are co-facilitated by a Literacy South staff member and an outside consultant, the participants increasingly share leadership roles and responsibilities."

Ms. Drennon says that the five retreats focus on these themes:
1) Getting ready for research (focused on how to frame problems/issues); 2) Becoming researchers (focused on developing research questions from problem statements, data collection, and research ethics; 3) Listening to the stories (focused on how to analyze data and how to collaboratively analyze the data people have collected); 4) Telling the story (focused on sharing the outcomes of research projects with colleagues in the group and developing a vision for a group-authored publication of projects; and 5) Having a say (focused on presenting research findings to outside interested parties who are invited in for the occasion).

For more information contact: Cassie Drennon, Dept. of Adult Education, 424 Tucker Hall, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602. E-mail: cdrennon@moe.coe.uga.edu.

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Special Project

Volume 1, No. 4
June 1996

Action Update

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE STATEWIDE ACTION RESEARCH NETWORK

COABE '96 Pre-Conference ... Learning from Practice

On Wednesday, May 15, 1996, from 10:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m., practitioners from across the United States gathered at the Doubletree Hotel in Pittsburgh, PA, for COABE '96 Pre-Conference Session #6, "Learning from Our Own Practice: Practitioner Inquiry and Action Research for New Knowledge and Improved Practice." The day was facilitated by Allan Quigley, Director of the Pennsylvania Action Research Network; Alisa Belzer, Director of the Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Network; and Sue Cockley, Director of the Virginia Practitioner Action Research Project. Practitioners from Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, New York, Virginia, Michigan, Wisconsin, Colorado, and Nebraska were in attendance. The variety of places represented truly demonstrated the breadth of interest in the value improving practice and increasing knowledge through these practice approaches.

Seated in a large circle in the Doubletree, the day began with participants sharing in turn where they were from and a bit about their work. Following that get-acquainted time, the group was divided into four interest groups. These groups focused on the work of the Pennsylvania Action Research Network, the Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Network, the Virginia Practitioner Action Research Project, and the Michigan Action Practitioner Inquiry Project. Seminar participants were asked to select a group based on their interest and/or involvement in one of these four projects. The groups discussed the structure of the various projects and the work in which they are currently involved. Each group then had an opportunity to report to the whole group once it reconvened.

In the all-group reporting session, the focus was on defining some similarities among the projects. The goal was to determine the common ground on which action researchers stand, regardless of where their work occurs. Some of the similarities and differences observed through the discussions were:

Similarities:

- Need for a wide network
- Granting of financial incentives
- Written products required from participants
- Flexibility in focusing research questions
- Stress on professional and leadership development
- Need for facilitators/leaders to guide researchers
- Need for support system among the researchers

Differences:

- The ways in which research literature is used
- Ways in which people start the action research process (e.g., some begin with a research problem in mind, others formulate the problem over time)
- Role of the group in the process differs from project to project
- Different projects had different goals for doing the research
- Different levels of formality of training in the action research process
- Different audiences for dissemination of research findings
- Some projects have a handbook, some do not.

Following lunch, the afternoon was spent in practical matters, in hopes of equipping the participants to more effectively participate in action research in their home settings. This process began with a time of brainstorming during which group members raised questions and concerns regarding action research generally,

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YEAR-END WRAP-UP EDITION

This is the last issue of Action Update for 1995-96. As the headline says, this edition will summarize some of the work of PA-ARN and the PALPIN, as well as look at our day-long learning-from-practice pre-conference.

NEWS FLASH!

Both PA-ARN and PALPIN have been granted funding for 1996-97!

ACTION UPDATE

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Monday–Thursday, 1–3 pm

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

or its place in their actual work settings specifically. The questions and concerns then served as the basis for the final all-group discussion. Due to time constraints, all of the issues could not be discussed. ***Some of the questions and concerns are:***

- When is research going on?
- What are valid quality expectations for a participant to receive an incentive grant?
- Who decides what is "quality"?
- How can findings be disseminated?
- Is it possible for several states to share in a project, thus broadening its impact? If so, how?
- How can you position learning from practice in an organization so that is seen as an asset, not a frill or add-on?

Following this lengthy discussion of specific issues, the day closed with the group taking turns to share the one thing that was most meaningful to them from this workshop. Some of the comments included:

- Impressed with the practical nature of the process.
- Inspired to return home to implement this process.
- This can be a way to help others back home to develop a passion for their work.
- The interactive/reflective nature of the workshop was a paradigm of what this process is.

PA-ARN: Year-end Report

As the fiscal year ends for the Pennsylvania Action Research Network, five groups have been operating across the state. PA-ARN Team Members have led groups of action researchers in Beaver, Bethlehem, Erie, Johnstown, and Pittsburgh. Of the respondents to the year-end evaluation, 86% chose the "agree" or "strongly agree" responses to the statements, "Action research is a valuable way to resolve practice problems" and "Action research is a valuable way to add new knowledge to the field."

To date, the following monographs of PA-ARN projects have been approved for publication, and will be available from AdvancE:

- Building self-esteem through reading (Susan Cooper)
- How classroom tests affect students sense of progress (Kathleen Moon)
- Increasing the return of monthly progress reports (Debbie Thompson)
- Attendance and retention of Adult Basic Education students (Pat Scott)
- Increasing recruitment in the Gateway Project (Paige Thomas & Gail Campbell)
- Improving attendance of adult learners (Virginia Fetsko, Nancy Ott, & Lisa Walsh)
- Recruitment of ABE students through structured strategies (Gary Narbut & Joseph Mando)
- Implementing a portfolio system in the adult reading/writing classroom (Karen Tuminello)
- Learner retention action plan (Lisa Schmalzried)
- Increasing vocabulary levels of deaf students (Patricia Palmiscno)
- Improving retention and resolving personal problems by instituting a regularly scheduled student support group (Nicole Despines)
- Increasing students critical reading skills (Monica McAghon)
- Linking adult education programs to post-secondary institutions (Barbara Kroh)
- Utilizing alternative assessment tools with individuals having develop-mental challenges (Joy Zamierowski)

More information about these projects, and how to contact the researchers, is available through the PA-ARN database by calling Gary Kuhne at PA-ARN headquarters (412/372-4095).

PALPIN: Year-end Report

Alisa Belzer, Director of the Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Network, shared an extensive list of the topics PALPIN projects have considered during this past year. A sample of the topics considered:

- What does "discovery learning" look like in my class?
- What will happen when I try to implement a program-wide inquiry project as staff development?
- How are ESL students learning to read in a second language?
- How do practitioners and learners use the books I have written?
- How can a small learning group support reading growth for the lowest-level readers in a very large class?
- What happens when I try to implement a visual screening for use during intake/student orientation in a volunteer-driven program?
- What happens when I try to get students to return to class after they have dropped out?
- How do various stakeholders in a workplace literacy class perceive the benefits of the class?
- What happens when I implement small discussion groups focussed on literature in my GED preparation class?
- How do I feel about having a learner-centered classroom, and how do my students respond to this new approach?
- What happens when a process for adult learners to set and assess their monthly goals is implemented?
- What teaching strategies help make adult education studies more interesting to learners?
- What does "community" look like in my program, and how does it get built?
- What could we do to improve retention in our program?

Ms. Belzer observed that "these projects represent a large range of interests, kinds of teaching contexts, and job positions. I think what stands out for me are ... that many projects are aimed at understanding better students' perceptions of their work so that they can take less for granted, make changes and improvements based on learner input, etc. Ultimately, these kinds of projects have the potential to reconstruct learner roles in classrooms and programs at the same time that practitioners are able to improve their own practice." Reflecting on the many projects being considered in PALPIN, Ms. Belzer noted, "Most of them have a very open attitude and are based on the assumption that there is much to be learned by looking closely at what's going on." For more information on PALPIN, Alisa Belzer can be contacted at 215/898-8865.

In closing . . .

The facilitators of both PA-ARN and PALPIN wish to take this opportunity, in the last 1995-96 edition of ACTION UPDATE, to thank all who made this first year so successful!

Have a great summer!

APPENDIX C

PENNSYLVANIA ACTION RESEARCH NETWORK FIELD EVALUATION
(Total Respondents = 17/29 = 59%)

A. ABOUT THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE PROJECT:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
A.1 Notification about the Project:					
**I had ample notification about the project before it began:*		2	2	7	6
**I had a good idea of what this was about when I responded:*		2	5	6	5
AVERAGED PERCENTAGES		**11%**	**20%**	**69%**	
**Comments:* *1) I was interested in working on "answers" to problems in adult ed., but until I responded I did not know what action research was.* *2) I was skeptical of action research at first, now I think it's the greatest. It brings research to the practitioner, which I think is very important.* *3) I didn't really understand what this project was about until after the first couple of meetings.* *4) My initial understanding was that this was a "for credit" course through Penn State University.*					
A.2 Training in Action Research:					
**I was satisfied with the training on how to conduct action research:*		1	3	10	3
**I was satisfied with how the trainer conducted the training session(s) for our group:*			2	11	4
**The Handbook and Planner helped me:*				13	4
AVERAGED PERCENTAGES		**3%**	**10%**	**88%**	

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Comments?

1) Each person in the class was given time to present their plan and bring up any questions they had. I liked that.

2) I don't think I could have completed the project as easily without the questions and planner.

3) The trainer made herself available to help in any way.

4) Working through the research planner is the best training. The trainer was available and willing to help when needed.

5) More training should have been given on what was expected.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
A.3 Support During the Project:					
**I was satisfied with the support from my project leader while I was conducting my research project:*			3	8	6
**I was satisfied with the collaboration I got from the other members of the group:*			1	5	7
AVERAGED PERCENTAGES			**13%**	**87%**	

**Comments?*

1) The trainer made himself very available to us personally in class, by phone, fax and mail. I always felt I was receiving support.

2) I think the feedback from the group was most helpful.

3) The group was very supportive of each member and the projects they were undertaking.

4) I was not part of the group.

A.4 Administrative Suggestions for the Future?

1) I would have preferred to start the project earlier in my school year. Plan it for the Fall to possibly avoid bad weather.

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B. ABOUT THE INDIVIDUAL ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
B.1 Process of Action Research Itself:					
**Action research is a valuable way to resolve practice problems:*			3	8	6
**Action research is a valuable way to add new knowledge to the field:*			1	10	6
AVERAGED PERCENTAGES			**12%**	**88%**	
**Comments?* *1) I feel that when the results of all the plans are put together, the results (regardless of success or failure) can prove a valuable tool for anyone in the same situation.* *2) Although we normally use an informal version of action research to solve programmatic problems, I enjoyed the formality of this exercise, it seemed to give the endeavor more "weight".* *3) The process is too drawn out to resolve problems in an ample amount of time but it does add a lot of information for the program.*					
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
B.2 Outcomes of Your Research Project:					
**The process of dealing with a problem through action research was helpful in itself:*			2	6	9
**The outcomes of my project were helpful to my work:*				9	8
**Compared to most of the professional development workshops offered in my region, I believe this is the best way to invest my time:*			8	7	2

*I will consider using the data I have collected in future grant writing:			8	4	3
AVERAGED PERCENTAGES			**27%**	**73%**	

*Comments?
1) If not for the project, I doubt if I would have gone through the process.
2) Experts and practitioners have much to share.
3) I'm not sure it was the best way to invest my time. It certainly was a most useful and valuable source of professional development. I don't think we should limit ourselves to just one way in anything. I don't do any grant writing at this time, but action research certainly would be a valuable tool for the procedure.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
B.3 Significance of the Outcomes:					
*The results of my study have resolved the problem I identified:		10	1	4	2
*I will/already have begun another cycle of investigation on this or another topic:		4	5	4	4
*I will/have begun another cycle of investigation on this or another topic and will pursue it without an honorarium if necessary:	1	3	7	2	4
*I will/already have shared the outcomes with my co-workers in addition to the monograph:				12	5
*I will/I intend to present the outcomes of my project at a professional meeting in the future (e.g., PAACE, in-region meeting, etc.)	1	3	5	5	2
AVERAGED PERCENTAGES	**26%**		**21%**	**53%**	

*Comments?

1) I have already been thinking of a revised project that I would like to try in the Fall.

2) Both phases of our recruitment experiment were successful and might have application significance for other programs.

3) I don't know if the problem of poor attendance could be considered resolves. We found out what does not seem to be a factor.

4) Unfortunately the results of our study did not come out in a positive manner due to the original trial in the 1st cycle; however, because of action research we now know what won't work. Our results were positive.

C. EFFECTS OF THIS PROCESS ON YOUR OWN WORK:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
*I can now identify the types of problems I encounter on the job more clearly:		1	6	7	3
*I believe I can take better, more systematic steps to deal with problems I encounter on the job and will do so with action research:			5	10	2
AVERAGED PERCENTAGES		3%	32%	65%	

*Comments?

1) I found out that action research helped me organize and identify problems in a very orderly, logical way. It may proved useful in several areas besides work problems.

2) One project is not enough to enable us to apply action research to every problem that arises. There are too many issues, choosing one per quarter would be best.

3) I can't say that action research made the difference.

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C.2 Taking Steps to Effect Change:					
*I now have greater confidence that I can undertake effective steps to resolve problems I identify on the job using action research:			3	10	4
*I now have the confidence to help others take such steps:			6	9	2
*I will/am already working to bring about changes beyond my immediate work, in my program more generally, as a result of this project:		2	4	7	2
AVERAGED PERCENTAGES		**4%**	**25%**	**71%**	

*Comments?

1) I have decided to keep my project going into the 96-7 year because it was found to be a very effective instrument in my program.

2) Unfortunately my program is so tentative at this time that any steps being taken are toward securing my job. We continue to begin new projects within our organization that aren't in the appropriate stages for action research.

3) Affecting change is most difficult without the complete cooperation of staff and supervisor...staff becomes settled in and very resistant to change even if it would make their job easier or program better.

4) I am currently not using action research but could very well try it in other areas in the future.

		Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
C.3 My Role With Other Practitioners:					
*I believe my role among the others with whom I work has changed as a result of this project:	1	3	10		
AVERAGED PERCENTAGES		**29%**	**71%**	**0%**	

*Comments?

1) Sometimes I think the staff perceives me as a "pain" always questioning why we do it this way. Its difficult for me to maintain status quo when I know things could be better, and I'm not afraid to point fingers.

2) My role has not changed with my co workers.

3) My immediate supervisor is aware and understands action research, but my colleagues don't seem to understand or care. The administration of this organization has taken no notice of this research either. It is frustrating.

D. PERCEPTION OF SELF:

*I believe my perception of myself as a practitioner has changed:	1	1	7	6	2
AVERAGED PERCENTAGES	**12%**		**41%**	**47%**	

*Comments

1) The project was not as difficult as I thought it would be.

2) As with most knowledge comes confidence!

3) I believe action research will help me become a better instructor as well as a program planner, someday. It was an excellent experience.

4) I am pleased I pushed myself to participate. I want to learn more about action research. Now that I have participated in one a second project will help to solidify my knowledge and understanding.

5) I believe that action research would be more helpful to me and my program if I were to research a different project than the one I chose.

E. OVERALL

Looking back, some of the things I liked best were:

1) Hearing the other topics researched.

2) Working closely with other adult educators and learning of their concerns. Working with professors of adult education.

3) I loved the meetings - getting feedback from the other participants was invaluable. It also helped to established links between people involved with other organizations.

4) Participating in the project and comparing results.

5) Being able to identify a small workable problem area. Empowerment, I can find solutions to problems!

6) It "forced" me to actually research a problem systematically. By having deadlines, I didn't put off the research for when I had more time.

7) Feedback from the group.

8) Developing a system to track outcomes.

9) The chance to meet with other practitioners involved in research.

Looking back, some of the things I liked least were:

1) There are a lot of variables, things that are beyond one's control.

2) Scheduling around work and weather.

3) Most participants were administrators, rather than, instructors.

4) The amount of work time to complete the project.

5) Writing the results! (3 replies)

6) My specific project.

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F. SUGGESTIONS

If this project goes next year, my suggestions are:

1) Keep on keeping on!

2) It will be more popular because others will have heard from us about the successful experiences we had.

3) Explain the amount of work/time it takes to complete the project.

4) Try to work in more instruction time. Have everyone work on the same topic.